

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CONAKRY 0398

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: SHUM, GV
SUBJECT: ICRC VISIT TO GUINEA

REF: (A) STATE 013706, (B) GENEVA 2809, (C) GENEVA 2352

1. SWISS CHARGE STATES THAT HE HAS DELIVERED ICRC'S PROPOSAL FOR ONE-WEEK VISIT BEGINNING MARCH 14 AND GOG HAS AGREED. FACT THAT ICRC'S MID-MARCH VISIT DATE MAY LIE ATHWART EXPECTED WEST AFRICAN SUMMITRY INVOLVING SEKOU TOURE AND NEIGHBORING LEADERS AIMED AT EFFECTING RECONCILIATION OF GUINEA WITH SENEGAL AND IVORY COAST WAS APPARENTLY NOT CONSIDERED SO INCONVENIENT THAT DATES COULD NOT BE ACCEPTED.

2. FOLLOWING IS UPDATED BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON POLITICAL PRISONER SITUATION FOR GENEVA TO BRIEF ICRC DELEGATION PER REF A:

3. ALTHOUGH IN PAST YEARS GUINEA'S HUMAN-RIGHTS RECORD HAS BEEN POOR, THE TREND HAS BEEN QUITE ENCOURAGING DURING THE PAST HALF-YEAR. TIMING OF ICRC VISIT IS APT. IN JULY 1977 SEKOU TOURE PARDONED ALL GUINEAN EXILES ABROAD AND INVITED THEM TO RETURN AND INVEST IN GUINEA,
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ALTHOUGH ONLY LIMITED NUMBERS HAVE SO FAR DONE SO. CONSUMER RIOTS IN LATE AUGUST BROUGHT MUCH DISCIPLINARY RHETORIC BUT WHEN THE DUST SETTLED, TOURE'S REACTION WAS RELATIVELY MODERATE, AND HE HAS SINCE TOLERATED A GOOD DEAL OF PETTY TRADING AND CONSEQUENT INCREASES IN CONSUMER GOODS, IDEOLOGY NOTWITHSTANDING. THE INTERNAL ATMOSPHERE HAS RELAXED CONSIDERABLY. RECENT RELEASES OF

POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE THE LARGEST IN GUINEAN HISTORY, AND TOURE REPORTEDLY INTENDS TO FREE MORE THIS YEAR. GUINEA RATIFIED INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS ON CIVIL-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC-SOCIAL RIGHTS IN JANUARY. TOURE'S RECONCILIATION WITH HIS MODERATE NEIGHBORS HOUPHOUET AND SENGHOR SEEMS IMMINENT.

4. AT PRESENT, WE BELIEVE THE TOTAL NUMBER OF "POLITICAL PRISONERS" MAY BE WELL BELOW 1000, ALTHOUGH HUMAN-RIGHTS:

ORGANIZATIONS ABROAD USE A SOMEWHAT HIGHER FIGURE. PART OF THE PROBLEM IS SEMANTIC: IN A HIGHLY CENTRALIZED AND PERSONALIZED PARTY-STATE WHICH HAS ABSORBED MOST OF THE FUNCTIONS OF PRIVATE ECONOMY AND ADMINISTRATION, MANY OTHERWISE CIVIL CRIMES LOOK "POLITICAL" -- E.G., CORRUPTION OR INCOMPETENCE BECOMES "POLITICAL WRECKING" AND "TREASON", INFLATING NUMBERS OF "POLITICAL" DETAINEES. DURING LAST DECEMBER SOME 60 VERIFIED " POLITICAL" PRISONERS WERE RELEASED; ROUGHLY SOME 200 HAVE BEEN RELEASED DURING THE PAST YEAR; CERTAIN FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS HAVE PUBLISHED MUCH HIGHER ESTIMATED.

5. SEKOU TOURE REMAINS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO HUMAN-RIGHTS ISSUES. LAST JUNE-JULY HE INDULGED IN MUCH PUBLIC ABUSE OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AND FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY
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FOR THEIR HAVING CRITICIZED GUINEA'S HUMAN-RIGHTS PERFORMANCE. HE IS BITTERLY RESENTFUL OF ALATA'S BOOK "PRISON D'AFRIQUE". IN TOURE'S MIND, THOSE HE HAS IMPRISONED ARE MOSTLY "WAR CRIMINALS" FOUND GUILTY OF SUBVERSION DURING OR AFTER THE PORTUGUESE-BACKED COMMANDO ATTACK ON CONAKRY IN 1970. HE WILL INSIST ALSO THAT DIALLO TELL, EX-OAU SECRETARY-GENERAL, AND OTHERS JAILED DURING THE 1976 "FOULAH PLOT" WERE IN FACT INTRIGUING AGAINST HIM AS A "FIFTH COLUMN". TOURE DEFENDS HIS OCCASIONALLY HARSH MEASURES AS NECESSARY TO THE SURVIVAL OF HIS REVOLUTION, AND POINTS OUT THAT MANY COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD, INCLUDING FRANCE, HAVE TAKEN SWEEPING PUNITIVE MEASURES IN EMERGENCIES AGAINST "TRAITORS". HE AND HIS LIEUTENANTS FEEL THAT THE WORLD IS "PICKING ON GUINEA", THAT THEIR ACTS WERE NOT EXCESSIVE IN PROPORTION TO THE THREAT WHICH THEY FACED.

6. GIVEN THIS MENTAL SET, THE U.S. HAS FOUND IT BEST TO ESTABLISH A QUIET DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS WITH TOURE AND TOP GOG OFFICIALS WITHOUT INDULGING IN PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS OR POLEMICS. WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO CONVINCE THE GOG THAT BECAUSE OF POOR PUBLICITY (ABOVE)

ITS HUMAN RIGHTS IMAGE ABROAD, RIGHTLY OR WRONG, HAS
BECOME A MAJOR IMPEDIMENT TO EXPANSION OF COOPERATION
WITH THE U.S. WE HAVE POINTED OUT THAT THE U.S. WANTS
TO DO MORE TO ASSIST GUINEA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUT
CONGRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION WILL BLOCK THIS UNLESS THE
GOG MEETS THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEM IN COOL, OBJECTIVE
POLITICAL WAY AND SHOWS BY CONCRETE ACTS AND GESTURES
THAT IT INTENDS TO CORRECT ITS UNFORTUNATE IMAGE. IT IS
IN PARALLEL WITH OUR DEMARCHES -- AND THOSE OF THE FRENCH
AND OTHERS -- THAT WE HAVE SEEN ABOVE AMENESTIES AND OTHER
ASPECTS OF ENCOURAGING TREND TAKE SHAPE. AS GOG OPENS
ECONOMICALLY TO WEST TO RETRIEVE 20 YEARS OF
MUDDLE, IT HAS EVIDENTLY BEGUN TO REALIZE THAT ITS POOR
HUMAN RIGHTS IMAGE INDEED MAY SERIOUSLY HURT PROSPECTS
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FOR WESTERN AID AND INVESTMENT. IT IS IN APPEALING TO
TOURE'S AND GUINEA'S SELF-INTEREST AND ENCOURAGING
EXISTING TREND TOWARD BROADENED GUINEAN CONTACTS WITH
WESTERN ORGANIZATIONS THAT EMBASSY SEES BEST CHANCE FOR
CONTINUING CONSTRUCTIVE GAINS IN HUMAN-RIGHTS AREA.

7. ONE PARTICULARLY ENCOURAGING SIGN WAS CORDIAL
RECEPTION SEKOU TOURE GAVE VISITING DR. OTTO HAGENBUCHLE,
REPRESENTATIVE OF UNHCR RESIDENT IN DAKAR, IN FEBRUARY.
HIS WAS FIRST UNHCR CONTACT WITH TOURE IN MORE THAN A
DECADE, AND IT MAY BE THAT AS RECONCILIATION WITH SENEGAL
AND IVORY COAST PROCEEDS, UNHCR MAY FIND NEW, CONSTRUCTIVE
ROLE IN HELPING GUINEA TO RESETTLE ANY RETURNEES FROM
SENEGAL, IVORY COAST, SIERRA LEONE OR ELSEWHERE, IN LINE
WITH PRESIDENT TOURE'S EXILE AMNESTY (ABOVE). RECOMMEND
THAT ICRC DELEGATION TALK IF POSSIBLE WITH HAGENBUCHLE
BEFORE COMING TO CONAKRY TO GET HIS PERSONAL INSIGHTS
INTO THE CURRENT ATMOSPHERE AROUND PRESIDENT TOURE.

8. ICRC'S PLANNED CAUTIOUS OPENERS TO GOG, OUTLINED IN
REF C, PARA 4, MAKE EXCELLENT SENSE TO US.

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